

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.

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## THE ART OF HISTORIC DETECTION

Part 2

**Victor A. Walsh, District Historian**

The 1930 rehabilitation by Coutts is critical to understanding the design, dimensions, and materials used in building the Cosmopolitan Hotel in 1869. Why? Unlike today, Coutts' work crews salvaged and reused a wide variety of materials from Seeley's hotel, including porch roof decking, beams, purloins, and even balcony posts. The country then was mired in a Great Depression, and it was prohibitively costly to replace existing building materials with shipped goods.

Before stuccoing the second-story walls, Coutts' work crews boarded-up the doorframes, windows, and other open spaces of the hotel with roof decking from the Seeley veranda. "Coutts reuse of original materials from the Seeley period," says Larry Felton, "has allowed us to identify the original locations and dimensions of the doors and windows of the hotel."

In addition, engineer Robert Robinson and historical consultant Bruce Coons have been able to identify porch beams and purloins from the Cosmopolitan Hotel in several boarded-up sections on the second story. Robinson and Coons also discovered the 1869 veranda roofline of the hotel (18 inches below the existing roofline) and what appears to be an original veranda post in the downstairs kitchen.

All of this indicates that the building contains more historic fabric than initially anticipated. "Our project to rebuild the hotel," says Robinson, "thanks to Coutts reusing a lot of the material from Seeley's period is really a restoration."

Continuing, he further explains: "With the exception of the roof, we have lots of samples of original fabric, and we know where they were located. That's pretty remarkable—materials (from 1869) that still exist after nearly two lifetimes."

What can we conclude from this? Unlike the depression-ridden 1930s when Coutts renovated the Cosmopolitan Hotel,

today, mass-produced building materials are readily available at Home Depot and other local outlets. In 2008, it generally costs contractors less money to buy new materials than to reuse existing ones because of code requirements and availability of reproduced authentic-looking, historical materials.

The reuse of on-site historic fabric—the "firsthand evidence" to borrow from Sherlock Holmes—is the most important informational source about a building's history. Nothing—historic photographs, drawings, written records, or off-site salvaged materials—can replace it.



Archaeologist Larry Felton measuring previously hidden opening

